

VZCZCXRO6119
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #2709/01 3060717
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 020717Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8055
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002709

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: UNITED COUNCIL OF OPPOSITION MEETS AMBASSADOR

REF: A. TBILISI 2559

[B](#). TBILISI 2662

[C](#). TBILISI 2574

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: On October 26, representatives of the ten-party United National Council of opposition (ref A) met the Ambassador and presented to him a copy of the four core demands they submitted earlier to President Saakashvili's and Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze's offices. The Council then appealed to the Ambassador for him, or "someone of equal rank," to intercede on their behalf with the President and initiate dialogue, possibly before the planned November 2 protest (ref B). The Ambassador encouraged the Council to continue dialogue with the government, strongly warned against violence, and emphasized the importance of rule of law and U.S. support for judicial reform. On October 28, businessman and independent opposition figure Badri Patarkatsishvili (ref C) announced that he would finance the November 2 protest and asked the opposition to hold it "in a civilized manner." End Summary.

Opposition Meets Ambassador,
Reiterates Demands for Government

[2](#). (C) On October 26, representatives from the ten opposition parties that constitute the United National Council called on the Ambassador en bloc. Attendees included: Goga Khaindrava (Equality Institute, NGO), Zviad Dzidziguri and Kakha Kukava (Conservative Party), Shalva Natelashvili and Kakha Dzagania (Labor Party), Shalva Khachapuridze and Marina Muskhelishvili (Georgia's Way), Koka Guntsadze and Gia Tortladze (United Georgia, Okruashvili's party), Koba Davitashvili (People's Party), David Bardavelidze (Freedom Party), Jondo Bagaturia (Georgian Dasi), Paata Davitaia (We Ourselves), Kakha Shartava (National Forum), and Levan Gachechiladze (independent lawmaker). The group presented a list of four core demands to the Ambassador, which they gave to the President's and Speaker's offices earlier in the week. To drive home their demands, the Council has been organizing a large protest against the Saakashvili government in front of Parliament on November 2.

[3](#). (C) Conservative representative Kukava presented the first three demands: 1) hold parliamentary elections in spring 2008 -- the original timeframe under the constitution (changed last year by Parliament); 2) change the majoritarian system that applies to half of the seats in Parliament to reflect one vote/mandate for each individual candidate, rather than the current "winner-takes-all" system; and, 3) modify or replace the Central Election Commission, so it includes members of the opposition. Kukava pointed out that these points are to ensure the integrity of the election process, with the main demand being early elections.

¶4. (C) In a rambling prelude, Shalva Natelashvili introduced the fourth demand, calling for the release of "political prisoners," which Khaindrava then finished presenting. The Council considers Irakli Okruashvili a political prisoner due to the circumstances of his arrest, regardless of his complicity in corruption. They said that at least four opposition party leaders are currently under arrest for "political reasons." (Comment: This argument was not well supported in the conversation and was difficult to assess for accuracy. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) Kukava stated that the Council had come to the Embassy together in order to make their demands "clear." The group said that they wanted cooperation and dialogue with the President and desired to proceed constitutionally. Kukava confirmed the Council had provided a letter with their demands to the President's and Speaker's staffs, but that they had received no response from either. He carefully suggested that perhaps the letter was not received by the President "in the right form" and suggested that perhaps the right "personality" (indicating the Ambassador) could take the request to him. Kukava cautioned that the Council had intentionally not set ultimatums or asked for resignations.

¶6. (C) Kukava asked if the Ambassador, or someone of similar rank, could mediate between the Council and the government. He noted that "time still exists before (the) November 2" demonstration. Muskhelishvili pointed out that the Council did not want the Ambassador to defend the opposition, but rather to help calm the situation.

TBILISI 00002709 002 OF 002

Regional Protest Turns Ugly,
Patarkatsishvili Stirs the Pot Again

¶7. (C) On October 28, at a rally in Zugdidi organized by the United National Council, several youth assaulted some opposition members, including Khaindrava. Public Defender Sozar Subari (the government ombudsman), Speaker Burjanadze and the opposition roundly condemned the assaults. Local police were criticized for observing the assaults and taking no action. (Subsequently, two men were jailed for 20 days and five others were fined for their part in the attacks.)

¶8. (C) The same day, in a written statement from London, Badri Patarkatsishvili announced that he will finance the Council's campaign for early elections and the November 2 protest rally. He said that he fully supports the opposition's demands and wanted to finance the campaign in order to ensure the protests are organized "in a civilized manner."

¶9. (C) Government officials, including Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava, criticized Patarkatsishvili's offer. Ugulava decried Patarkatsishvili as a "traitor" and said "his putsch will not work in Georgia." Others continue to imply that Patarkatsishvili is being influenced by Russia.

¶10. (U) New Rightist Chairman David Gamkrelidze (whose party is not a member of the United National Council and does not plan to join the protest on November 2) flew to London to meet with Patarkatsishvili on October 29. Like Patarkatsishvili, the New Rightists support the call to hold Parliamentary elections in April. Gamkrelidze said that Patarkatsishvili can "play a very serious role in maintaining processes in a constitutional frame." Regarding Patarkatsishvili's infusion of money to the opposition, he commented that "it can be only positive if legal money is used for this campaign, instead of illegal money coming from foreign countries."

Comment

11. (C) The disparate group of Council members bickered and talked over each other during the meeting with the Ambassador, displaying the cracks in their unity. Kukava presented most of the formal points, but Goga Khaindrava dominated the open conversation. Most of the other opposition leaders did get a chance to say a few words. The Ambassador stressed several points during the meeting. He encouraged the Council to continue seeking dialogue and offered to continue encouraging this with the government as well. He strongly warned against violence, stressing that Georgians have seen enough of it. He reiterated that any changes in election law, or government, should be undertaken constitutionally. Finally, he agreed that a true, functioning judiciary is critical to any democracy and that the USG continues to push hard for judicial reform.

TEFFT